

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**RECORD OF DECISION**

**FINAL GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Badlands National Park, North Unit**

**South Dakota**

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared this Record of Decision (ROD) on the final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) for the North Unit of Badlands National Park. The ROD includes a description of the background of the project, a statement of the decision made, synopses of other alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, a description of the environmentally preferred alternative, findings on impairment of park resources and values, a listing of measures to minimize environmental harm, and an overview of public and Agency involvement in the decisionmaking process.

**BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT**

The purpose of the GMP is to define the general future guidance and direction for the management of Badlands National Park for the next 15 to 20 years. A separate GMP is being developed for the guidance and management of the South Unit of Badlands National Park, and is scheduled to be completed in three years. The present plan will provide a framework for making decisions about ways to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural resources and to provide for a high-quality visitor experience in the North Unit of the park. The clarification of what must be achieved according to law and policy is based on review of the park's purpose, significance, and special mandates.

**DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)**

The NPS has selected the preferred alternative (alternative B) as described in the final GMP/EIS issued in November. Under the selected action, opportunities for visitors to use the North Unit of the park will be expanded. The objectives of this alternative are to achieve the following:

- Increase the quality and available range of opportunities of visitor experiences.
- Offer more educational and recreational opportunities for park visitors seeking in-depth experiences within the park.
- Create management zones for more effective achievement of long-term goals for resource conditions.

The number of locations where visitors could obtain park information and orientation will be increased, with new visitor contact stations added near Pinnacles and in the town of Scenic. In addition, more hiking trails and routes will be designated in various parts of the North Unit. Education pavilions will be added in the Conata picnic area and west of County Road 502, along with a group campground.

Additional studies and environmental documents will be developed, as appropriate, to examine alternative road alignments for the Loop Road at Cedar Pass. Finally, under this alternative, the NPS will recommend expanding the North Unit's boundaries in two locations to enhance resource protection and offer additional visitor experiences. One boundary expansion recommendation will incorporate approximately 5,400 acres along South Dakota Highway 44. The other recommended addition will be 4,500 acres along the western edge of the North Unit, adjacent to the wilderness.

## **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

Under **alternative A** (the no-action alternative), the NPS would continue to manage Badlands National Park as at present. Existing operations and visitor facilities would remain in place, concentrated at Cedar Pass and Pinnacles. Previously planned construction would move forward. The management of the park would continue to be aimed at perpetuating and protecting the natural environment and preserving cultural resources. The no-action alternative would not include any boundary adjustments.

The focus of **alternative C** would be to emphasize resource protection, with visitors' use of the park directed toward preventing or minimizing damage of resources. A visitor orientation facility would be built near Pinnacles. Under this alternative, the NPS would recommend expanding the park boundaries in three locations. This would include the two boundary adjustments described in alternative B and the acquisition of the Prairie Homestead, a privately managed museum that interprets a sod house from the homesteading era of the Great Plains.

The focus of **alternative D** would be on protecting resources, furthering knowledge of the park's resources through research, and using this information to further educate visitors about the park. To protect the resources and allow research to proceed, four parts of the North Unit would be closed to the general public. A visitor contact station would be established in or near the town of Wall to offer orientation to the park. Under alternative D, the NPS would recommend expanding the park boundaries in the same two locations described in alternative B.

## **BASIS FOR DECISION**

In reaching its decision to select the preferred alternative, the NPS considered the purposes for which Badlands National Park was established and other laws and policies that apply to the management of the park. The NPS also carefully considered public comments received during the planning process.

Seven primary criteria were used in making the decision to select the preferred alternative. The alternatives were evaluated based on how well they:

1. Protected resources and natural processes.
2. Provided orientation and education for visitors.
3. Provided visitor access and recreational opportunities.
4. Protected the health, safety, and welfare of the public and park employees.
5. Improved park operational efficiency and sustainability.
6. Ensured compatibility of the park's actions with its neighbors, the surrounding ecosystem, and the Oglala Sioux Tribe.
7. Improved the knowledge of park resources through research.

The advantages and costs of each alternative were considered in determining which alternative provided the NPS with the greatest overall benefit for the most reasonable cost.

Based on its analysis, the planning team determined that alternative B provides the greatest advantages and therefore was selected as the preferred alternative. The selection of alternative B was based on striking the best balance between a high standard of natural and cultural resource protection with improved opportunities for visitors. The current visitation pattern has been primarily a sightseeing driving experience along the Loop Road. This alternative provides visitors additional opportunities. Furthermore, the selected action responds to the changing visitation pattern the park has been experiencing. Historically, the majority of visitors (greater than 90 percent) have been entering the park at the northeast entrance, traveling west, and exiting the park at Pinnacles. This visitation pattern has resulted in park visitor facilities being primarily located at the eastern end of the park.

In recent years, western South Dakota has become more of a destination for visitors with Rapid City serving as the hub for this visitation. This shift in tourism patterns has increased the number of park visitors entering the park through the western entrances. The selected alternative provides for this change in visitation pattern. It also provides needed improvements for park operations, such as areas for additional park housing and research support. The park is located in a rural area and housing for employees is limited in the surrounding communities. In addition, the park has developed a good relationship with the natural resources research community but has limited facilities for supporting these efforts. The selected action would address the need to provide facilities for park operations and research.

Compared with the action alternatives, alternative A (the no-action alternative) would result in a lower quality visitor experience in the park and would provide less protection for natural and cultural resources. This alternative would not provide additional resource protection through boundary adjustments. It also would not address the need for employee housing nor would it respond to the changing visitor patterns.

The differences between alternatives C and B were relatively slight. However, factors 2 and 3 were the main points of difference between the two. The zoning in alternative C would result in reduced access for visitors to explore and learn about the resources of the Badlands, as compared with alternative B. In addition, alternative C is the most costly alternative, almost double the cost of alternative B, in part due to the proposed demonstration transportation system.

While alternative D would similarly protect resources like alternative B, alternative D would restrict access and visitor recreation choices to an unnecessary degree. Alternative D focuses on research, however, the selected action would accommodate research adequately without the loss of visitor access.

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

The environmentally preferred alternative is defined as the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act. That section indicates that it is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to do the following:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
2. Ensure safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings for all Americans.
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.
4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and a variety of individual choices.

5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Three of the above goals did not make a difference in determining the environmentally preferable alternative. Goal 1 is satisfied equally by all of the alternatives. Badlands National Park is a unit of the national park system and as the trustee of this area, the NPS would continue to fulfill its obligation to protect this area for future generations. All the alternatives would fulfill goal 2, ensuring safe, healthful, productive, and culturally pleasing surroundings for all Americans. All of the alternatives also would result in enhancing the quality of the renewable resources through the NPS management and thus satisfy goal 6.

The environmentally preferred alternative for the North Unit of Badlands National Park GMP/EIS is alternative B, the alternative preferred by the NPS. Alternative B would surpass the other alternatives in realizing the full range of national environmental policy goals in section 101. In particular, the preferred alternative attains the widest range of beneficial uses without degradation (goal 3); preserves natural and cultural resources while providing a diversity and a variety of individual choices (goal 4); and achieves a balance between population and resource use (goal 5). Alternative C is similar to alternative B in its provisions for resource protection, however, it would not provide the opportunity for as wide a range of acceptable visitor uses. Thus, alternative C would not meet policy goal 3 as well as alternative B.

Alternatives A and D would similarly protect resources as alternatives B and C. However, alternative D would restrict visitor access and visitor choices and would not achieve a balance (goals 3, 4, and 5) as well as alternative B. Alternative A would not provide the balance between resource protection and providing a high standard visitor experience.

The balance of resource protection and the improvements to the visitor experience provided by alternative B would best meet the goals of the National Environmental Policy Act and therefore was chosen as the environmentally preferred alternative.

## **FINDINGS ON IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES AND VALUES**

The NPS may not allow the impairment of park resources and values unless directly and specifically provided for by the legislation or proclamation establishing the park. The prohibited impairment would occur when, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, the integrity of park resources or values would be harmed. Any effect on a resource or value could be an impairment, but impairment would be most likely if it would result in a major or severe adverse effect on a resource or value whose conservation is:

- Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park.
- Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park.
- Identified as a goal in the park's GMP or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance (NPS Management Policies 2006, section 1.4.5).

This policy does not prohibit all impacts to park resources and values. The NPS has the discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, so long as the impacts do not constitute an impairment. Moreover, "...an impact would be less

likely to constitute an impairment if it is an unavoidable result of an action necessary to preserve or restore the integrity of park resources or values and it cannot be further mitigated..." (*NPS Management Policies 2006*, section 1.4.5).

After analyzing the environmental impacts described in the GMP/EIS and public comments received, the NPS has determined that implementation of the preferred alternative will not constitute an impairment to Badlands National Park, North Unit's resources and values. Indeed, many of the resource impacts of the GMP/EIS were determined to be beneficial impacts. Adverse impacts of implementing the selected action are not anticipated to be of sufficient magnitude to warrant a finding of impairment of park resources and values, as described in the final GMP/EIS. For example, adverse impacts to air quality, soundscapes, geologic features, vegetation, wildlife, and ethnographic resources would range from negligible to moderate.

### **Measures to Minimize Environmental Harm**

The NPS has investigated all practical measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm that could result from the selected action. Measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been identified and incorporated into the preferred alternative and are described in the final GMP/EIS.

For natural resources, measures to minimize environmental harm include, but are not limited to: using best available clean fuel technology on construction equipment; instituting a dust abatement program; erecting silt fences for areas under construction; following the park's spill prevention and pollution program for hazardous materials; locating new facilities to avoid impacts water resources; taking various steps to prevent soil loss; developing revegetation plans and monitoring restoration efforts; conducting surveys for special status species as appropriate; locating new facilities to avoid sensitive wildlife habitats; timing construction to avoid sensitive wildlife periods; conducting surveys in areas where there would be ground disturbance for the presence of paleontological resources; and increasing efforts to stop illegal collecting of paleontological resources.

Measures to minimize harm to cultural resources include, but are not limited to: consulting with the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Officer, Tribal officials, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and other interested parties when surveying sites where there would be ground disturbance for archeological resources, and monitoring archeological resources during construction; adhering to the park's design guidelines and The Secretary of the Interior's (SOI) Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties; and adhering to standards and guidelines of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record.

### **PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

This final GMP/EIS for the North Unit of Badlands National Park represents input and ideas presented by the NPS, other Agencies, American Indian Tribes, and the public. Consultation and coordination among the Tribes, Agencies, and the public were vitally important throughout the planning process.

#### **Public Meetings and Outreach**

Public meetings and newsletters were used to keep the public informed and involved in the planning process for the park. A mailing list was compiled consisting of American Indian Tribes, Governmental Agencies, nongovernmental organizations, businesses, legislators, local governments, and interested citizens.

A notice of intent to prepare an EIS was published in the "Federal Register" on July 20, 2000. A newsletter was issued in September 2000 described the planning effort. A total of 30 comments were received in response to that first newsletter.

The NPS conducted public meetings in Rapid City, Kyle, Wall, and Sioux Falls in October 2000. A total of 16 people attended those meetings.

A second newsletter distributed in February 2001 described the issues that would be addressed in the plan and presented preliminary management zones to be used in developing the alternatives. Six written comments were received in response to the second newsletter.

A third newsletter distributed in November 2001 described the draft alternatives for managing the park and identified the NPS's preferred alternative. In November 2001, the NPS hosted public meetings in Rapid City, Wall, Pine Ridge, Manderson, and Kyle. Those meetings were attended by 35 people. A total of 33 written comments were received in response to the third newsletter and the public meetings.

### **Public Comment**

The public comment period for the draft GMP/EIS for Badlands National Park's North Unit began with the publication of a notice of availability of the document in the October 19, 2005, "Federal Register." The draft document was sent to all Agencies and organizations on the planning team's mailing list and was posted on the Internet at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>.

The NPS received comment letters and oral comments at public meetings held in Rapid City, Wall, and Pierre, South Dakota. Where appropriate, the final GMP/EIS has been revised to address the comments.

A total of 14 separate written comments were received during the comment period, including letters and e-mail comments. The comments were from three Federal Agencies, one State agency, five nongovernmental organizations, one business, and four individuals. They are reproduced in the final GMP/EIS along with the NPS responses to substantive comments.

### **Agency and American Indian Consultation and Coordination**

**Consultation with State Historic Preservation Officer.** The NPS sent letters to the South Dakota Historic Preservation Office and the ACHP on May 15, 2000, inviting their participation in the planning process. Both offices were sent all the newsletters, with a request for their comments.

The NPS, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer, is required to make a determination about programmatic exclusions, all other undertakings, and potential effects on those resources to seek review and comment under 36 CFR 800.4-6 during the plan review process. The specific undertakings are listed in the final GMP/EIS, along with the NPS's determination of how those individual undertakings relate to the 1995 programmatic agreement.

**Consultation with American Indian Groups.** The NPS sent letters to the following American Indian groups on January 23, 2002, to invite them to participate in the planning process:

Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe  
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe  
Flandreau Santee Sioux  
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe  
Oglala Sioux Tribe  
Omaha Tribe  
Rosebud Sioux Tribe  
Ponca Tribe  
Santee Sioux Tribe

Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux  
Spirit Lake Nation  
Standing Rock Nation  
Three Affiliated Tribes  
Trenton Indian Service  
Turtle Mountain  
Winnebago Tribe  
Yankton Sioux Tribe

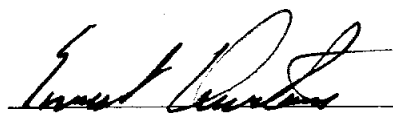
In addition, the NPS presented the preliminary alternatives to the Tribal Council of the Oglala Sioux Tribe on January 22, 2002. The presentation included an overview of the alternatives, a description of the next steps that would be taken in the planning process, a summary of the public comments, and an opportunity for questions and discussion. The Tribe was particularly interested in efforts to increase visitation to the South Unit, opportunities for economic development on the reservation near the South Unit, and protection of sacred sites in the park. Park staff met with various committees and Tribal offices to brief them on the planning effort. In addition, the Tribes had an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan.

**Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.** The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, requires in section 7(a)(2) that each Federal Agency, in consultation with the SOI, ensure that any action the Agency authorizes, funds, or carries out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.

The NPS initiated informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in September 2000 to determine the presence of federally listed threatened and endangered species in Badlands National Park. To remain up-to-date about listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, the NPS has consulted that Agency's Web site. Copies of the three newsletters also were provided for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Agency was given a copy of the draft document for review. The USFWS concurred with the NPS's findings.

## CONCLUSION

The NPS has selected the preferred alternative (alternative B) as its GMP for Badlands National Park, North Unit. Among the alternatives considered, this alternative best protects Badlands National Park's North Unit's cultural and natural resources while also providing a range of quality recreation and educational experiences, meets the NPS goals for managing the park, and meets national environmental policy goals. The preferred alternative will not result in the impairment of resources and values.

Approved:  Date: 12-14-2006  
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